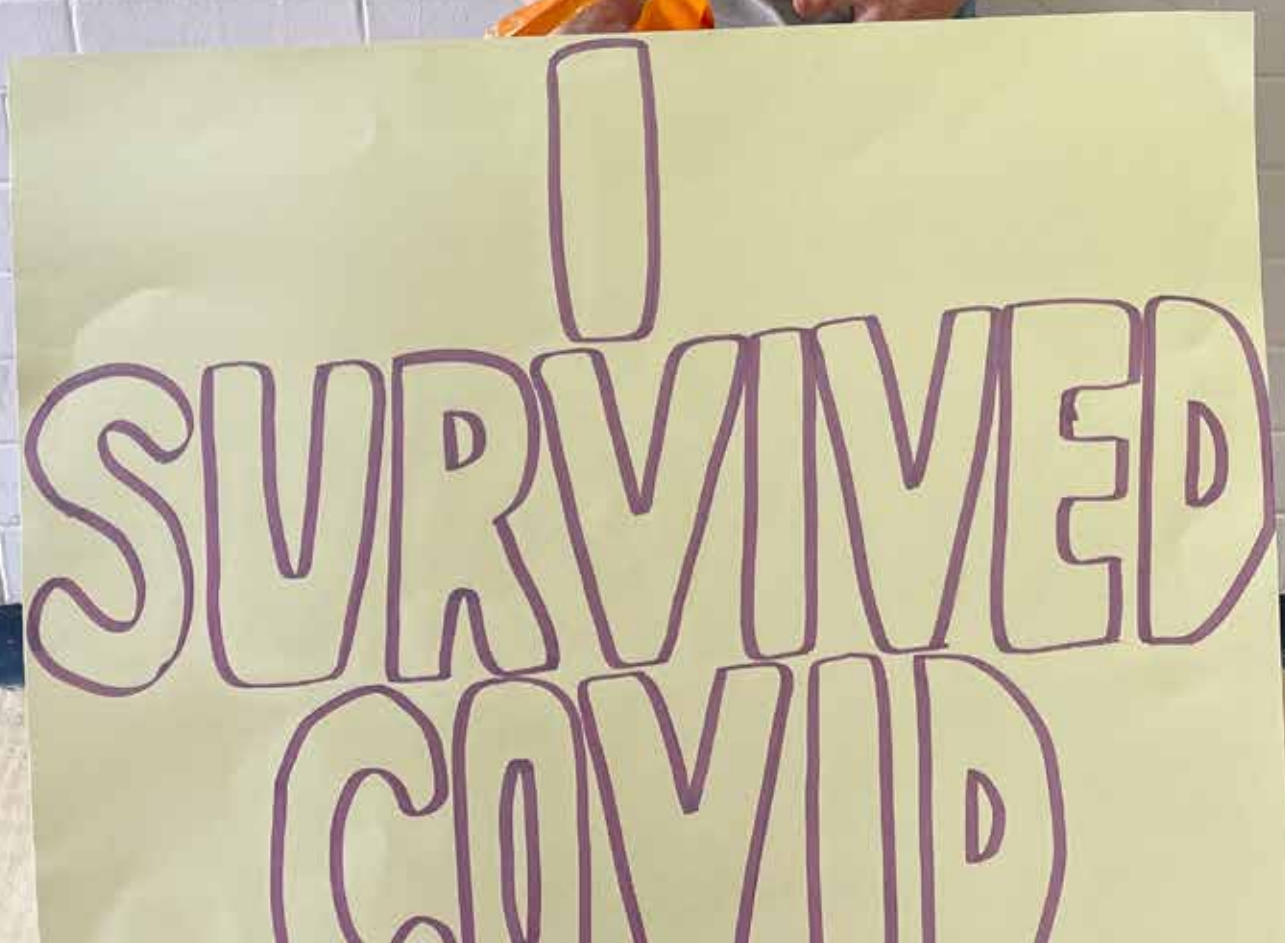


Dom from The Motivation Hub  
with his 'I Survived COVID' poster.







Champions from Union of Muslim Organisations volunteering at the vaccination bus in Caldmore Green.

# About the COVID-19 Community Champions Programme

The Walsall COVID-19 Community Champions Programme is primarily aimed at supporting residents from our ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities and under-represented groups who may be most at risk of COVID-19.

Walsall for All have been working in partnership with Walsall Council (including Public Health), NHS Black Country and West Birmingham CCG, Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust and others to deliver this programme.

Funded by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the role of Community Champions is:

- to help increase vaccination uptake
- to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- to tackle the spread of misinformation around COVID-19 and the vaccine
- to reduce the impact of the virus on families, neighbourhoods and wider communities

In this special issue of the Walsall for All newsletter, we recognise the work of the COVID-19 Community Champions and local organisations (from phase one) who have played their role in ensuring everyone in Walsall has the information they need to stay safe, help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and ultimately save lives. [www.walsallforall.co.uk/community-champions](http://www.walsallforall.co.uk/community-champions)



Service users from The Motivation Hub handing out leaflets in Aldridge.



Rev. Morgan and Rev. Woodstock outside New Testament Church of God Faith Temple - Walsall with their banner.



Community Champions from Vera Group at Walsall Arboretum.

## Our partner organisations

Aaina Community Hub (in partnership with Walsall Black Sisters Collective and Iqra Supplementary School), Afghan Community and Welfare Centre (working in partnership with SOORA), Aisha Mosque and Islamic Centre, Midland Mencap, Multi Kulti West Midlands CIC, New Testament Church of God Faith Temple - Walsall, Oak Tree Trust Walsall, Refugee and Migrant Centre, Ryecroft Community Hub, The MindKind Projects CIC, The Motivation Hub, Union of Muslim Organisations, Vera Group, Zebra Access CIO.



MindKind Projects supporting a Walsall resident with the vaccination process at Birchills Mosque.





Inese with her husband, Konstantins.

## Inese's Story

### COVID-19 Champions

Vera Group is one of several organisations participating in the COVID-19 Community Champions programme. The group empowers women from different European countries by promoting confidence and self-esteem and offering non-judgmental support and advocacy. Vera Group has also delivered ESOL classes, supporting community members to improve their English skills and feel part of the community they live in.

The group has also offered face-to-face and online support, communicated information about COVID-19 in different languages and helped community members with booking vaccinations and registering with a GP.

They have also recruited volunteers from across Walsall to get involved, develop their skills and most of all make a difference. One of the volunteers is Inese, who shares her experience as a champion.

“ My name is Inese and my husband's name is Konstantins. We are both 34 years old and we live near Bloxwich.

I used to attend Vera Group's ESOL lessons, which helped me a lot with speaking comfortably in English. During those lessons, we would also often discuss the recent COVID-19 news and updates. I learnt how so many people were still unaware of a lot of the recent information on the virus, especially regarding vaccinations. I was really inspired to help others and once I heard that I could volunteer as a COVID-19 Community Champion, I immediately knew this was something I wanted to do. I also shared this with my husband and he was very enthusiastic to get involved as well. Therefore, we both became COVID-19 Champions.

One of the reasons I love doing this is because of how many new people I get to meet. It really helps me to learn more about the members of my community and improve my English while doing so. My favourite thing about being a COVID-19 Champion is knowing I've helped the community and changed people's lives for the better.

One of my main roles as a COVID-19 Champion is speaking to other members of my community and spreading awareness of the virus. A lot of people don't actually keep up to date with what's going on and they don't know all the information about COVID-19, so it's my job to ensure everyone is aware of what is currently happening. As well as that, I gather people's opinions on the vaccine and encourage as many of them as I can to get vaccinated, by informing them of the process and how it could benefit them.

When talking to members of the community, I often come across people

who are sceptical, or even against the vaccine altogether. An example of this was a couple of families I had spoken to, who were unsure about whether they should get vaccinated. When speaking to them, I had the chance to share my own story and how I got the vaccine. I reassured them how easy it was to get it and the positive outcome it had for me. My story had inspired them, and with my support in the whole process, they had successfully gone through with their vaccinations.

Being a Community Champion means I get to help the community and make it a happier and safer place for everyone. I love that I had the opportunity to attend ESOL classes with Vera Group, as I would not be able to do what I do today without them. Before the classes, I barely had any confidence when speaking to others in English and struggled to maintain conversations. Now, communicating with others is no longer a stressful experience and I do it with ease. Of course, I still have more to learn, which is why being a COVID-19 Champion is so great. By speaking to different members of the community every day, not only do I learn more about other people living in my area, but I also build my own confidence.

For those who want to volunteer and help raise awareness of COVID-19, I would definitely recommend others to just go for it and be confident when doing so. If you love helping people, then volunteering to help your community is definitely the right choice. It is important that you have done all your research before you speak to others and ensure the information you are spreading is correct. Finally, one of the most important things is to make sure you remain open-minded and respect everyone's opinions, even if they do not match your own.







Fahim speaking to a client at Afghan Community and Welfare Association.

# Fahim's Story

## COVID-19 Champions

Afghan Community and Welfare Association is a local organisation that supports Afghans and migrant communities in the West Midlands. Their aim is to promote the welfare and benefit of the Afghan community in the area and also to encourage and promote community cohesion and integration. For the duration of the COVID-19 Community

Champions programme, they have been working in partnership with SOORA (Social Orientation and Relief Association).

One of the champions from the Afghan association is Fahim, who shares his experiences of being part of the programme.

“ My name is Mohammed Fahim Zazai and I live in south Walsall.

*I chose to be a COVID-19 Community Champion because I wanted to be part of something positive, be part of the COVID-19 vaccination programme and spread the awareness in the community to defeat Coronavirus and save lives so we can all live a normal life.*

*My role as a COVID-19 Champion is to speak to people in the community and encourage them to have the COVID-19 vaccine. If there are people who are concerned I listen and then provide more details about the vaccine and if needed help them get more information from local health professionals to help them make an informed choice. I can also help them to book an appointment at a local site to get the vaccine.*

*I would like to share **two** examples of where I have offered support as a COVID-19 Champion:*

**1** I had been supporting a man since the lockdown began. He was classed as high risk (clinically vulnerable). When the vaccination programme started, he was offered the COVID-19 vaccine. However, he was hesitant and did not want to have it. He was contacted by his GP but he still was not convinced. I spoke to him and I arranged a talk in the community, with people who were in a similar situation. I invited him to participate. Everyone who came shared their experience of having the vaccine. Following this, the man agreed to have his first dose of the vaccine after hearing from other people.

**2** Similarly, I met another lady who moved from another country. Due to her immigration status and lack of documents, she was not registered with a GP. Because of this, she thought she was not eligible and could not have the vaccine. I spoke to her and explained that she can have her vaccine. She was happy for me to help her with interpreting and filling in the forms. I was able to take her to one of the mobile vaccination buses, so she could receive her vaccine. I also managed to register her with a GP. She is now waiting for her second dose.

*I have been working in the community for many years, supporting newly arrived families and migrants, so volunteering as a COVID-19 Champion is another opportunity for me to work with different people in the community to understand their situation. It means I am contributing to the fight against Coronavirus and helping save lives. Furthermore, addressing COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy means more people will have the vaccine to help reduce the spread of the virus.*

*Anyone can help in their own way to support people with COVID-19. During the previous lockdowns, I witnessed many ordinary people come out to volunteer, helping people according to their needs in the community, from delivering essential food items and medicines, to helping vulnerable people and the elderly. If we try to help spread the awareness and address vaccine hesitancy, I am sure we can make a huge difference and help go back to normality.*”





Shahida taking phone calls and completing questionnaires with clients.

## Shahida's Story COVID-19 Champions

The Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC) is a charity supporting refugees and migrants across Birmingham and the Black Country. For their project, they recruited three Community Champions in a volunteering capacity to share the latest COVID-19 information with RMC clients. Shahida Tariq is one of the three champions who has kindly shared her experiences.

“The incredibly dull, long-term, lockdown that, for me, started in Almeria, Spain last year and continued in Walsall until March, left me bored and frustrated. In April 2021, at the age of 43, I joined RMC as a volunteer.

As a Pakistani, I had experience of working as a teacher, a coordinator, a section head and finally principal of a reputable educational institution. I had been involved in several development programmes where social action plans were targeted towards raising awareness.

I joined RMC as a COVID Champion to continue this type of work and to support the migrant community in the borough as well as to use my time more productively.

It has been an incredible experience so far,

being able to raise awareness and provide guidance where necessary; however, it has not been without challenge. Many people have been reluctant to attend appointments or even listen to the importance of getting vaccinated. It has been an immense pleasure though, I have met so many people from different parts of the world, who speak different languages. The sense of achievement when changing someone's opinion or perception for me has been incredible.

I noticed one lady, who seemed nervous and hesitant, had a language barrier so I asked her: “May I help you as a translator?”

She replied: “Yes, why not. Please.” I translated the adviser's information and guidance and asked her a few questions about herself and her reasoning. I challenged her on some of the misinformation she had received, and, after a while, she began to change her opinion.

A few weeks later, she visited RMC again. Recognising me, she showed me her arm where she had her vaccination. She told me: “I wasn't going to have this vaccine, but you changed my mind. Not only that but I have convinced my friends and family to do the same!”

I've learnt so much being involved with this campaign: cooperation, empathy, facilitation, time management and how to change people's perceptions from negative to positive.

After phase one of the COVID-19 Community Champions programme, Shahida has been employed as a member of staff by RMC. Everyone was impressed by her and her language skills.

Furthermore, two other volunteers were also able to go into full-time jobs following their work as champions.



The Hub promoted COVID-19 information at various community events during the summer.

## Aaina Community Hub COVID-19 vaccination podcast - the facts

Aaina Community Hub have produced a podcast with vaccination pharmacist Nazmeen Khideja as part of the COVID-19 Community Champions programme.

**A'isha Khan, Chief Executive Officer of Aaina Community Hub, explains what it means to be part of the programme, introduces the podcast and summarises the organisation's project activity.**

“For Aaina, it has been very important to be part of the programme. It has enabled us to have up-to-date information about the vaccination and government guidance that we have been able to share with our service users, especially those who have been the most vulnerable during COVID due to their ethnicity and may have been reluctant to get vaccinated because of the myths and perceptions that are circulated in the community via social media platforms and individuals.

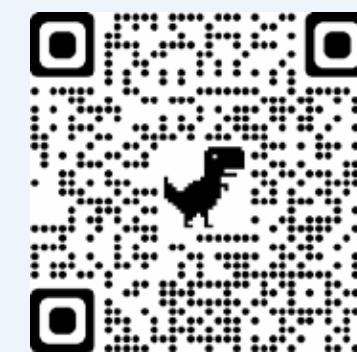
The podcast responds to the questions we have been receiving during face-to-face engagement with residents and also the responses we have had via the COVID-19 questionnaires that are being completed by projects across the borough.

We wanted to provide accurate and up to date information about the National Vaccination Programme, and have been lucky to have Nazmeen Khideja, a Pharmacist who is working for the vaccination programme here in Walsall to provide the information that most people have questions about.

The podcast, in essence, addresses the myths and perceptions that exist around the vaccination for instance related to pregnancy, choice, or how safe is the vaccine, and where reliable information can be found especially around travel etc. Along with providing an overview of the National Vaccination Programme, we hope that listeners find it useful and informative and it gives them the confidence to pop along to their nearest vaccination centre and get vaccinated if they have not already done so.

Alongside the podcast, we have been assisting individuals with booking their vaccinations. This has been a key area of our work especially those who do not have digital literacy skills, and despite wanting to were unable to book their vaccinations. We have also shared information at local events, completed questionnaires with residents who are otherwise disengaged and directed individuals to the community vaccination buses. All Aaina and Iqra staff are vaccinated and advocate COVID-19 vaccinations to service users and residents from disengaged communities and young people.

**Scan the QR code to listen to the podcasts on Anchor by Spotify.**



[www.walsallforall.co.uk/post/podcast-aaina-community-hub-covid-19-vaccination-the-facts](http://www.walsallforall.co.uk/post/podcast-aaina-community-hub-covid-19-vaccination-the-facts)



Main Hall  
Years 1 & 2  
Juniors  
Library  
ICT Suite  
Food Technology  
Suite  
Community Room  
Small Hall  
Lift



## The MindKind Projects CIC

Podcasts with young people

Pupils from Birchills C of E Community Academy with COVID Champions t-shirts.

The MindKind Projects CIC are a local organisation that advocates and promotes mental health and wellbeing through positive activities across Walsall. For their COVID-19 Champions project, they visited Birchills C of E Community Academy and North Walsall Primary Academy in summer 2021 to discuss COVID, how the pupils have experienced lockdown challenges and their thoughts on the future.

### Sureya Gulzar, CEO of The MindKind Projects CIC, reflects on the project and the podcasts they have produced.

“ At the MindKind Projects, we feel everyone has a role to play in staying safe as we have all been affected in some way by the pandemic. Thinking about young people, we wanted to hear and share the stories of school children. They have had to give up so much during the lockdown and adapt to new ways of learning. From missing friends and teachers to school meals, we heard from some of the children of Birchills C of E Community Academy and North Walsall Primary Academy. They told us how they are staying safe, what they missed and what they hope for the future. We hope people will listen to these young people and understand their own role in staying safe so that we can limit the need for further lockdowns. Being isolated is one of the biggest challenges for mental health.”

In **episode 1**, Sureya talks with pupils from North Walsall Primary Academy and discusses how they have been through lockdown, what it has meant to them and their families and community and looking to the future.

In **episode 2**, Sureya visits Birchills C of E Community Academy and chats to some of their pupils on the issues they and their community and families have faced during the COVID lockdown.

Since their project, MindKind Projects have now set up a podcast club, where residents can use the equipment available to launch their own podcast or have their voice heard. The club will be located in their podcast room at their new hub on Proffitt Street.

Scan the QR code to listen to the podcasts on BuzzSprout.



[www.walsallforall.co.uk/post/podcast-the-mindkind-projects-cic-covid-community-champions](http://www.walsallforall.co.uk/post/podcast-the-mindkind-projects-cic-covid-community-champions)



A service user from The Motivation Hub with a supermarket colleague handing out leaflets the Hub produced.

## The Motivation Hub

Supporting adults with additional needs about COVID-19

The Motivation Hub in Walsall Wood offer a specialised service to adults aged 18+ with additional learning needs.

### Suzanne shares how the Hub has been creative in sharing positive messages on COVID-19 and the vaccination.

“ The Motivation Hub is over the moon to have been one of Walsall for All's COVID-19 Community Champions groups. This opportunity has enabled adults with a learning disability to be part of such a very important project and represent disabilities of all types throughout the Walsall borough.”

For our project, we produced a video of service users talking about the COVID-19 vaccination. In addition, there were contributions from families and professionals. We have shared the video as far and as wide as possible, including other disability groups and health services such as GP surgeries.

Furthermore, we have had arts and crafts sessions, which have included making posters, so that our non-verbal service users can be just as involved as those who communicate verbally. Makaton was also used in the video.

Alongside the video, we have been out in the community distributing COVID-19 flyers, in Aldridge, Brownhills and Pelsall. We have also held a coffee morning, inviting members of the public to come along and see how we have supported the vaccination programme and service users sharing photographs of their experience as a Community Champion to date. In addition, we were pleased to have had the opportunity to support the COVID-19 vaccination bus through volunteering.

Being selected to be Community Champions has given service users a real lift, as many of them were feeling quite low after the lockdowns. Interacting with members of the public has massively helped to improve individuals' confidence, communication skills and social skills. It also helps service users to feel a part of the community that they all live in.

They also feel valued and important doing their part towards the video, whether that is telling their own short experiences of receiving the COVID-19 vaccination or holding up a poster.

You can watch The Motivation Hub's video on the Walsall for All website by scanning the QR code below.



[www.walsallforall.co.uk/post/video-the-motivation-hub-covid-19-information-video](http://www.walsallforall.co.uk/post/video-the-motivation-hub-covid-19-information-video)





Dean, aged 29 from Walsall, receiving his COVID-19 vaccination.

## Learning disability charity supports residents to take up the jab

The COVID-19 vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others from the virus. Having support from peers and trusted professionals and receiving the right information is essential to helping individuals make an informed choice.

Midland Mencap is one organisation that has supported individuals with disabilities to get their COVID-19 vaccination. They recently helped Dean, aged 29 from

Walsall, to make an informed choice to have his vaccination.

The charity took part in the COVID-19 Community Champions programme run by Walsall for All, Walsall Council and the local NHS. The programme provides funding for community groups to promote the benefits of vaccination to their members and service users.

### **Helena Whitehouse, from Midland Mencap, described the support that was offered to Dean:**

*“We initially approached our citizens to raise awareness of the COVID-19 vaccination. However, when we heard from Dean in particular, he was uncertain about whether he wanted the vaccination. There were discussions through wellbeing calls, face-to-face wellbeing walks and Zoom meetings among his peers and staff. He felt he needed time to think about it.”*

Using COVID-19 Community Champions funding, the team was able to add an additional layer of specialist support for Dean. This included two information sessions and face-to-face support with the learning disability nurse team from Orchard Hills Centre (for people with learning disabilities or additional needs), where Dean could ask questions about the vaccination, side effects and longer-term health concerns.

Helena added: *“As a result of the work we undertook, he agreed to have the vaccine, and the learning disability nurse accompanied him to his first appointment. He was fine and has not had any side effects. His second jab is now booked.”*

For Dean, receiving the vaccination means he is able to get back to some normality and do some of the things he had not been able to do for over a year. He was also happy to hear from a health practitioner in one of the information sessions that the vaccine was very effective to protect him against COVID-19.

Dean believes everyone should decide for themselves about the vaccine but says to people to get all the information they need to make the best decision.

Midland Mencap are also running a social media campaign using their Community Champions funding. They have taken photographs and filmed short videos of service users talking about the vaccination and are promoting clear COVID-19 messages so they can share information more widely in their communities.

The charity is also holding information sessions and working with partners in the health sector to tackle misinformation and encourage take-up of the vaccination amongst adults with learning disabilities, autism and other disabilities.

### **Councillor Stephen Craddock, Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing said:**

*“Thank you to Dean for sharing his vaccination journey and to Midland Mencap for empowering him to take the decision and get vaccinated. The COVID-19 vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others.”*

*“The interest and enthusiasm that the Walsall COVID-19 Champions have shown has been overwhelming. They continue to play an essential role in the sharing of reliable and up-to-date COVID-19 information to their families, friendship groups, workplace, networks and wider community.”*

### **Dave Pickard, Head of Community Operations for Midland Mencap, said:**

*“Midland Mencap is over the moon to be one of Walsall for All's COVID-19 Community Champions groups. We have campaigned from the outset to ensure disabled citizens across the West Midlands have had the right support, the right information and access to the vaccine at the earliest possible time.”*



# COVID-19 Community Champions groups - Summary

Below is a compilation of the amazing work our Community Champions have done over the last year. From vaccination support to information hubs for COVID related questions, our champions have gone above and beyond to support Walsall's residents in feeling safe and supported throughout this difficult time.

**Aisha Mosque** played host as a Lateral Flow Test site at their premises and encouraged their congregation to test regularly. They also delivered multiple vaccination awareness sessions via their weekly youth circles and regular women's circles.



A volunteer from Multi Kulti CIC working at the COVID-19 vaccination bus.

**Multi Kulti West Midlands CIC** have completed questionnaires to understand perceptions of the COVID-19 vaccination, which has helped with undertaking their project activity. Champions have supported the vaccination bus across Walsall, helping residents access their first or second dose and answer queries. Multi Kulti have also worked with NHS Black Country and West Birmingham CCG to produce a myth-busting video aimed at Polish-speaking communities.



New Testament Church of God Faith Temple - Walsall Community Champions outside with their banner.

**New Testament Church of God – Faith Temple Walsall** displayed a banner outside their church, with the key message being “the leaders lead by example by having the vaccine” and “supporting the vaccine for the benefit of everyone”. Champions also recorded individual video messages which were shared across Walsall for All and Walsall Council social media channels, with the aim of increasing vaccination uptake among Black African-Caribbean communities. Alongside this, the champions contacted community churches and conducted questionnaires.

**Oak Tree Trust Walsall** held an open day at their Proffitt Street centre, providing an opportunity for engagement. The group also hosted drop-in sessions at the centre on Thursday afternoons for people to ask questions on COVID-19, vaccinations and mental health and contacted various groups in the local area.



Dave showing his support for the COVID-19 vaccination bus at Ryecroft Hub.

**Ryecroft Community Hub** have completed questionnaires with all the user groups who use their centre and completed door-to-door activities to understand local sentiment around COVID and the vaccine. They have continued working on producing their COVID app which will be approved by Google and available to download soon.

**Union of Muslim Organisations** liaised with Public Health to organise and open the Lateral Flow Test site at Aisha Mosque. They engaged with various groups and communities about the vaccine, COVID and how they could support local residents. They also organised a COVID-19 Vaccination Awareness Session with a specialist doctor for local women.



Zebra Access distributing symptom-free test kits and engaging with the Deaf community at Saddlers Shopping Centre in Walsall.

**Zebra Access CIO** have been doing targeted engagement with the Deaf community. This has included BSL support at the Saddlers Vaccination Centre, producing short videos on COVID-19 key messages and a stall in the town centre to promote testing and other public health information. The organisation also hosted a Deaf café, which was well attended and conducted face-to-face engagement.



# A message of thanks

## Stephen Gunther, Director of Public Health said:

*“The Community Champions network was launched because we recognised the role our residents wanted to play in fighting COVID-19. I am so grateful that so many local groups signed up to help keep Walsall safe and well.*

*“I know this has been an extremely tough time for our communities, which is why it was vital to get the information and support out to where it was needed most. Our Champions groups have helped counter some of the misinformation around COVID-19, in particular the vaccines and have been a trusted voice in their community.*

*“This newsletter showcases some of the excellent work that has taken place over the past few months. I know for many being part of this work has been beneficial for them both personally and professionally.*

*“The COVID-19 Champions network has empowered hundreds of Walsall residents to remain up to date on the latest advice about COVID-19. I would like to thank everyone who has and continues to be involved in this work.”*

## Get your COVID-19 vaccination

The COVID-19 vaccine is our best defence against the virus - used alongside letting in fresh air, effective social distancing, wearing a mask and washing your hands.

Getting vaccinated means protecting yourself, and your family, friends and local community from the virus.

For more information visit [nhs.uk/CovidVaccine](https://nhs.uk/CovidVaccine)



Get in touch to find out more about Walsall for All

**WALSALL FOR ALL**

**Address:** Walsall for All, Resilient Communities, Walsall Council, Civic Centre, Darwall Street, Walsall, WS1 1TP.

**Facebook/LinkedIn:** Walsall for All **Instagram/Twitter:** @walsallforall

**Email:** [walsallforall@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:walsallforall@walsall.gov.uk) **Website:** [www.walsallforall.co.uk](http://www.walsallforall.co.uk)

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